

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1374

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMCONSUL BRISBANE POUCH

AMCONSUL PERTH POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 6599

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, ID, AS

SUBJ: TIMOR: GOUGH WHITLAM DEFEATS ALP CAUCUS CENSURE MOTION

REF: CANBERRA 6221

1. ON SEPTEMBER 21 SENATOR JOHN WHEELDON, ALP, WEST AUSTRALIA, MOVED THAT OPPOSITION LEADER GOUGH WHITLAM BE CENSURED FOR REMARKS WHITLAM MADE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION CONCERNING TIMOR. WHITLAM INDICATED DURING THE TELEVISION INTERVIEW THAT HE DISAGREED WITH THE ALP NATIONAL CONFERENCE DECISION TAKEN IN PERTH IN JULY THAT THE GOA SHOULD SUSPEND MILITARY AID TO INDONESIA UNTIL TROOPS WERE WITHDRAWN FROM TIMOR. WHITLAM WENT ON TO STATE THAT IN HIS VIEW SELF-DETERMINATION FOR TIMOR WAS NOT LONGER FEASIBLE. WHITLAM, IN A STATEMENT THAT OUTRAGED THE LEFT, CLAIMED THAT THE TIMORESE HAD "KILLED
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MORE OF EACH OTHER" THAN THE INDONESIANS HAD.

2. ALTHOUGH NOT DIRECTLY ADDRESSED IN THE CENSURE MOTION, WHITLAM ALSO ANGERED LEFT-WING CAUCUS MEMBERS BY HIS STATEMENT ON URANIUM DURING THE SAME TELEVISION INTERVIEW. WHEN ASKED BY THE MODERATOR, WHITLAM SAID THAT THE ALP WOULD CERTAINLY ACCEPT ASSURANCES FROM THE INTER-

NATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY THAT TECHNOLOGY WAS AVAILABLE FOR THE SAFE DISPOSAL OF NUCLEAR WASTE. PM FRASER ON THE FLOOR OF PARLIAMENT DESCRIBED THAT PART OF WHITLAM'S INTERVIEW AS "SIGNIFICANT AND RESPONSIBLE," CLEARLY WISHING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DEEP DIFFERENCES IN THE ALP OVER THE URANIUM ISSUE. SOME ALP CAUCUS MEMBERS TOOK THE VIEW THAT WHITLAM HAD AGAIN FLOWN DIRECTLY IN THE FACE OF ANOTHER CONFERENCE POSITION CALLING FOR AN INDEFINITE MORATORIUM ON MINING AND EXPORT OF URANIUM BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF PROLIFERATION AND BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE NUCLEAR WASTE DISPOSAL TECHNOLOGY. WHITLAM RATHER LAMELY ANSWERED FRASER'S STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT BY STATING THAT SAFE STORAGE METHODS WERE NOT YET IN OPERATION AND THAT THEY WERE THEREFORE UNPROVEN.

3. THE CAUCUS RESOLVED THE CENSURE ISSUE FOR THE PRESENT BY VOTING TO REAFFIRM THE CONFERENCE POSITION ON TIMOR. WHITLAM SECONDED THE MOTION TO AVOID CENSURE. HOWEVER, THE CAUCUS ALSO VOTED THAT WHITLAM WILL HAVE TO EXPLAIN HIS TELEVISION REMARKS ON TIMOR TO THE ALP'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE.

4. COMMENT: IF CAUCUS HAD VOTED FOR CENSURE IT WOULD HAVE AMOUNTED TO A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN WHITLAM'S LEADERSHIP AGAIN OPENING THE WAY FOR A POSSIBLE CHANGE IN ALP PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP. IN VIEW OF PRESENT CONFIDENTIAL

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PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, INDICATING THAT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR THE ALP TO SCORE A NARROW VICTORY IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS IF THEY WERE HELD AT THIS TIME, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF CAUCUS MEMBERS BELIEVE THAT THEIR CHANCES FOR ELECTION VICTORY WOULD BE GREATLY ENHANCED IF BILL HAYDEN WERE TO REPLACE WHITLAM AS OPPOSITION LEADER. ALSTON

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